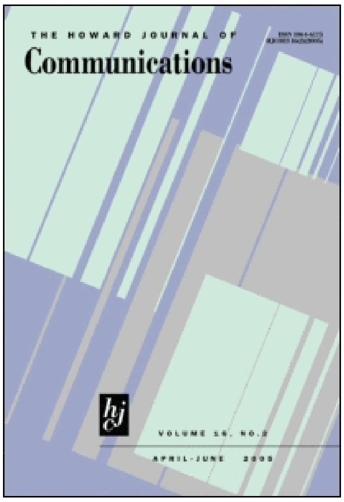

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Behind the Scenes of Women's Broadcast Ownership

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Behind the Scenes of Women's Broadcast Ownership

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Women in the United States own fewer than 6% of radio and television stations. This qualitative study had the dual goals of gaining a better understanding of (a) how women owners of radio and television companies enter the U.S. broadcast market, stay in the market, and contribute to their communities; and (b) how communication policy, economics, and sexual politics exclude women from ownership. Surveys and interviews with 40 participants (owners and experts) found more women inheriting stations than able to buy them. In addition, those who manage their own stations hold strong values of community service even in the face of great economic challenges. Experts said that women broadcast owners operate in a hostile regulatory environment and in an industry that blocks women from gaining experience and access to capital to prepare and successfully compete for ownership. Recommendations are offered for removing these barriers.

KEYTERMS broadcast ownership, gender and media, women and broadcasting, women and media ownership

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> The practical goal should be to assure a dispersal of ownership that leaves everyone able to experience some media as her own—as speaking for her or to her concerns—and thus able to view herself and her views as fairly included in public discourse.
>
> C. Edward Baker (2009, p. 654)

THE CRISIS OF WOMEN'S BROADCAST OWNERSHIP

Nineteenth-century women's suffrage leader Susan B. Anthony is claimed to have said that women would not be heard until they owned the newspapers—the main mass medium of her day. If she lived today, Ms. Anthony would surely expand her concern to the broadcast media. Although designated as a "public resource" in the Radio Act of 1927, the airwaves today are 95% under the control of male owners (Turner & Cooper, 2006; U.S. Government Accounting Office [GAO], 2007). A subsequent law, the Communications Act of 1934, specified that broadcasters would be required to serve "the public interest, convenience or necessity" (Einstein, 2004, pp. 10–11). With 51% of the population, women might expect to be proportionately served by the broadcast media—but how is this possible if women's ownership is in the low single digits? In 2007, women in the United States owned only 5% of the 2,388 television and 6% of the 10,506 full-power commercial broadcast radio stations operating. Most of those were in small towns and rural areas, markets that reach smaller audiences and that bring lower advertising revenues (Byerly, 2006). Non-White females comprised approximately 0.1% of these owners—barely countable (Turner, 2007, p. 19). Broadcast stations similarly have few females in top management (e.g., only 1% in radio; Turner, 2007, p. 5), and equally low numbers on boards of directors (Byerly, 2004).

Einstein (2004) is among those who have pointed out that both the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which has authority for licensing and regulating broadcasting, as well as the courts, have used ownership as the primary criterion for determining "diversity" in programming since 1973, when the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia ruled that "minority ownership is likely to increase diversity of content," and that such diversity of content would better meet the standard for "serving the public interest." The petitioners in this case were African American station owners in Florida whose application for a license had been rejected (Einstein, 2004, p. 24). Gender is the extension of the principle to serve all the public's interest. However, considering the principle of "public interest" today, with respect to gender, means acknowledging that in actual practice, public interest is heavily tilted toward men's interests, both in relation to ownership and management.

Such severe under-representation by women in both ownership and management can be understood to correspondingly affect the content and audience orientation of programming, especially in geographic areas where demands to serve a general audience may limit the options for women-oriented niche programming (Byerly, 2006). Empirical research supports this understanding, showing, for instance, that women's concerns are either missing or under-reported in mainstream (i.e., the large, corporate-owned) news media within the United States, particularly in the serious news of politics and economy (Byerly, 2009; Gallagher, 2005).

Women's ownership has been negatively affected by deregulation within telecommunications and other media industries and the conglomeration associated with these deregulation activities.[1] While there is a longer history of media consolidation that dates to the early 20th century in the United States, the most recent spate of mergers and acquisitions dates from the Reagan years of the 1980s, when ownership dwindled from several hundred to 50 companies that controlled the majority of print, broadcast, cable, book publishing, and other media industries (Bagdikian, 1987). Passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 served to further accelerate mergers and acquisitions under a pro-corporate FCC after 2001 (Aufderheide, 1999).[2] The lessening of numbers in ownership carries over to a lessening of voices and viewpoints, according to both FCC and courts, which have long held ownership to be the single greatest determinant of diversity of opinion in public affairs and other programming content. Framing the power dynamics inherent in the concept, First Amendment scholar C. Edward Baker (2009) observed that viewpoint diversity is reliant on ownership dispersal and that such is central to democracy. The media form the "central institution of a democratic public sphere," he said, and the dispersal of media ownership "always works in the direction of equalizing . . . a distribution of power among groups" (p. 654). The groups of specific concern in the present research are those delineated by gender.

The present research was undertaken with the understanding that small percentage points matter to women when broadcast ownership is concerned, and so do the experiences of those few owners who represent the statistics. The broad goals of the study were to gain a better understanding of how women owners of radio and television companies came into the U.S. broadcast market, stay in the market, and contribute to their communities. I also sought to learn more about the dynamics of the political-economy within which women broadcasters operate—or are prevented from entering. The study can be considered to be exploratory in that there is little existing research on which to model it, and because I anticipated difficulty in gaining participation from small-scale media owners who may not welcome questions about their business affairs, or who are inaccessible. Thus, the study also gathered and analyzed the insights of media professionals, scholars, and advocates familiar with the dynamics of gender and media ownership and other issues, in order to paint a more accurate picture of women's broadcast ownership in a time of rapid change, caused mainly by deregulation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since the 1970s, the majority of academic research on women and media, both in the United States and elsewhere, has focused on content—that is, on the ways in which print, broadcast, film, and advertising represent (or portray) women (Byerly & Ross, 2006). A lesser amount has considered the extent to which women's employment in media industries compares to that of men (Gallagher, 1981; Poindexter, Meraz, & Weiss, 2008; Rush & Allen, 1989). Very little has considered women's place in media policy-making roles or ownership (Byerly, 2004).

The first major study of female broadcast ownership, conducted more than 25 years ago, was based on a statistical analysis of completed Form 323 reports, which the FCC requires stations (other than sole-proprietor and educational) to file biannually. The ERLA Group, authors of the study, measured for gender in ownership of AM, FM, and TV stations by size of community. The study did not consider majority-owned female stations, in particular, but rather looked at women's involvement as stockholders across the industry. Stockholders are those with a voting interest in the company. The ERLA study established that nearly a fourth (24%) of the stockholders of AM stations, a fifth (20%) of FM stations, and a sixth (17%) of TV stations were female (ERLA Group, 1982, p. 21). The FCC-commissioned study also revealed that more than 85% of the females owning stock in broadcast stations had a family relationship to the male owners, the most common being wife and mother (p. 52).

Where the ERLA report shows a relatively robust involvement by women in ownership overall, more recent studies by Turner and Cooper (2006), Byerly (2006), and the GAO (2008) focused specifically on women's majority ownership of stations. Taken together, these studies suggest a noticeable dwindling, with (as noted earlier) women owning only 4.97% of the television stations and only 6% of the full-power broadcast radio stations (Turner & Cooper, 2006, p. 2; Turner, 2007, p. 4; Byerly, 2006). The U.S. General Accounting Office observed that "available evidence from industry stakeholders and experts" together with independent reports, "suggests that ownership of broadcast outlets by these groups [i.e., women's and minority] is limited" (p. 20). The barriers to ownership the GAO report identifies, with specific regard to women's ownership, include media conglomeration and lack of easy access to sufficient capital for financing the purchase of stations.

Media historians have pointed out that the relationship between having the means to "speak" publicly and the ability to influence political and social institutions has been understood at least since the late 19th century, when women's rights and other social reform movements sought the attention of news media both to mobilize followers and to maintain loyalty in their ranks

(Kielbowicz & Scherer, 1986). Recent research (Byerly & Ross, 2006) has documented women's media activism since the late 20th century aimed at gaining access to news and other media through ownership, as media professionals, and by external campaigns for more egalitarian coverage, in order to expand women's participation in democratic process and institution building.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Feminist scholars have extended Habermas's concept of the democratic public sphere—central to his theory of communicative action—in order to recognize women's media activism as a strategy to speak publicly and thereby influence social and political processes. For example, in posing the Model of Women's Media Action, Byerly and Ross (2006) extended the Habermasian concept to show various approaches that women in the late 20th century took to use media in creating a women's public sphere for a stronger public voice. The authors point out that feminist media activists have also sought to lay the foundational strategy to achieve a women's public sphere by embedding a related concept, women's right to communicate, in documents like the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in 1995. "Strategic Objective J," contained in that declaration, calls for increasing women's participation and access to expression and decision making in the media and new communication technologies. Examples of media activism have included demanding that media organizations adopt policies guaranteeing equality in hiring and promotion, carrying on external letter writing and other campaigns to protest sexist content, and starting their own media companies such as radio production, film, and book publishing (p. 114).

The concept of ownership is central to the present research. Ownership, which is represented by an individual's investment and the voting rights that go with it, is understood as a site of gendered struggle for control over decisions affecting employee-management relations, facilities management, investment and expansion, programming, and other matters associated with running a company that produces and disseminates program content. Women's greater participation at ownership levels of a media company would potentially—perhaps even logically—enable women to speak publicly about their interests and concerns, to react to issues of the day, and to advocate for policies and practices favorable to their social standing. Thus, the theoretical framework for the present study also looks to the recently posed feminist theory of social responsibility, which defines a media company as one that provides coverage of issues affecting women, includes a range of female sources, provides a forum for exchange on gender-related issues, and includes gender parity at all levels of the company structure, including management and ownership (Byerly, 2009, p. 392). The present study emphasizes the last of these criteria, ownership.

As Freedman (2008) and other critical scholars have noted, media policy occurs in a larger world shaped by the complex dynamics of politics, economics, history and culture. Less acknowledged is that gender and race provide the fault line along which these factors operate. Media policy has historically and consistently given White wealthy men the advantage over women and non-White people in their quest for access to ownership. Racial discrimination in broadcast regulation has been at the center of civil rights struggles in the United States since the 1960s, and it remains central today with a burgeoning scholarly and legal literature, and whole organizations, such as the Minority Media and Telecommunication Council, and the United Church of Christ's Office of Communications, to advocate for them. Women's movement leaders took a smaller but nonetheless important interest in discrimination in broadcast. During the 1970s, women's groups used the "petition to deny" a broadcasting license to call attention to sexist policies and practices at individual stations (Beasley & Gibbons, 2003, pp. 192–3). The alternative method of "informal objection," which was easier to prepare, was also used, Beasley and Gibbons said. The National Organization for Women, which supported the majority of these complaints, identified three outcomes from these challenges:

> One, the process led to improved relations between citizens and local broadcasters. Two, such citizen participation in the broadcast regulatory process directly catalyzed increased programming of interest to women and minorities . . . Three, the challenger had a positive influence on broadcaster employment of women and minorities. (Beasley & Gibbons, 2003, p. 201)

Beasley and Gibbons, who have chronicled women's groups' media activism on legal grounds, recognize the inseparable relationship between media policy, control of stations, and content. The last of these, programming, is what defines whether broadcasters truly meet their regulatory obligations to serve the public's interest—something predicated on their use of commonly owned public airwaves.

METHODOLOGY

The present research sought to understand the problem of women's low ownership rates in the broadcast media by talking to those who experienced it, and/or who had otherwise assessed ownership through their roles as media professionals, scholars, and/or advocates for women and minorities in media. By moving "inside" the problem, and talking to knowledgeable actors, the study pursued an interpretive (qualitative) epistemology.

Research Questions

The study asked eight questions about women broadcast owners' experiences, including (a) how women owners of radio and television companies entered the broadcast market, (b) what they define as their role within their companies, (c) whether and how they have survived economically under deregulation, (d) what they see to be their contributions as females in a male-dominated industry, and (e) which gender-related barriers still exist in their view.

In addition, the study sought to learn from experts (f) how gender shapes the professional and political dynamics of the larger environment of the broadcast world in which women's ownership exists but clearly does not thrive, (g) what inhibits women's advancement in ownership, and (h) what would remove barriers to ownership.

Samples of Women Owners and Experts

Questions 1–6 were answered by surveying a geographically representative sample of women broadcast owners identified through FCC Form 323[3] ownership reports. Approximately 250 women who represented the majority owner(s) of their station(s) were invited to complete a short questionnaire asking a range of questions associated with how they obtained, staffed, managed, and programmed their stations, and whether/how they believed their gender entered into their experiences. Because the response rate to the mail-in questionnaire was low (about 10%), I conducted follow-up phone calls to an additional 180 stations, selected at random, to learn whether ownership had changed since the last reports had been filed and whether the owner was involved in managing the station. I was able to speak to someone in authority at approximately 100 stations about current ownership, and, in some cases, whether the female owner was involved in station operations. The tasks associated with the survey among broadcast owners' portion of the study were conducted by the principal investigator, assisted by a second faculty member. A team of four student assistants conducted follow up calls.

Questions 6–8 were answered through interviews with 17 experts who had specific knowledge about the gender politics of the broadcast industry. Volunteers were invited through electronic and other solicitations issued through American Women in Radio & Television (AWRT), Minority Media Telecommunications Council (MMTC), and several feminist and media justice networks. Volunteers included 15 women and 2 men. Twelve of the 17 were Caucasian, 3 were Hispanic, and 2 were African American. They were of diverse geographic representation, with half situated along the east coast, the rest on the west coast, the west, and the south. Their occupations included public interest attorneys, feminist and race media scholars, and professionals who had worked within the broadcast industry for many years and had specific insights to gender politics. All interviews were conducted by the principal investigator, with assistance from a faculty colleague in one of them. Approximately half were conducted in person, the other half by telephone.

Participants in all parts of the study were given the assurance of anonymity, in accordance with human subject procedures at Howard University.

Analysis

Information gathered through all three data collection procedures (questionnaires, follow-up phone calls, and interviews) were coded and assembled in spreadsheets for the purpose of identifying common themes and patterns. Some questions lent themselves to counting something specific; these numerical data fall into the realm of descriptive qualitative data and are specific to the particular sample comprising this study—they may not be used to generalize findings to all female owners or experts associated with women's broadcasting. I note, however, that they be used to suggest questions and hypotheses for future research.

FINDINGS

Ownership Survey and Follow-Up Phone Calls

Profile of participant broadcast owners

Twenty-three women participated in the ownership survey. Nearly all were in their 50s or 60s, and all identified themselves as Caucasian. Educational levels ranged from no college education to college degrees, and even post-graduate education. Respondents' companies were primarily AM or FM radio stations, and these were located throughout the nation, with relatively more representation in the east and southeast regions. Nearly all respondents owned one or two stations, but a few owned up to four. Most had been owners for two or more decades.

Entering the market

Only 8 of the 23 respondents said they had purchased their stations outright; 12 came into ownership through inheritance, transfer (from a family member), or a combination of transfer and purchase. Three said they had acquired their property through auction.

Defining roles within the companies they own

Most women owners participating in this study indicate that they do not manage their stations. Only 10 (less than half) of the respondents to the questionnaire said they have any managerial responsibilities at the stations, even though they possess majority voting rights. Of those without management involvement, 6 said they are "owners on paper only," and that their husbands, sons, or other male member of the family, or a male general manager, runs the day-to-day affairs. This respondent's comment was typical:

> While I am listed with the FCC as majority owner, and I am the majority owner, it is really my husband who runs the stations. I handle the financial aspects of the stations, and am not involved in any major decisions.

This same respondent added, "I do not have a broadcast background; I am actually [another occupation]." Another respondent said that her ownership in two television stations was "marginal." The low involvement in station management by the respondents to this survey may be explained in part by how most respondents said they acquired their stations.

In an effort to expand information about women's ownership and involvement, the researcher and several research assistants made follow-up calls to another 180 stations, selected at random, reaching an actual person to speak with at 100 of those.[4] This revealed that 20 had sold, most to Clear Channel (the largest radio conglomerate in the U.S.) or another corporation; 20 were being run by male family members or male employees rather than the female(s) who owned them; and another 6 were living out of state and inactive as "owners." Three elderly owners had died, with stations passing to male heirs in all cases. The remaining 51 stations were unwilling to provide details of their owners.

In summary, of the 64 stations I was able to obtain information from, either by questionnaire or telephone call, only 10 (all respondents to our survey) indicated that female owners had any involvement in management, policy, or other operations at their stations.

SURVIVING ECONOMICALLY UNDER DE-REGULATION

All but two of the respondents said they have invested additional resources in stations since acquiring them, with the most frequent focus of these investments being equipment upgrades, remodeling of facilities, and creation and maintenance of a website. Nearly all of the 23 respondents made comments about hard times, loss of revenues, and the difficulty of acquiring capital to invest in needed improvements to facilities and equipment. One of the owners, who indicated she is the sole proprietor of her station, has struggled in recent years. She noted that revenues had dropped 22% between the years 2006 and 2007. With a station in a rural, rather isolated area, she gets "no ads from the big box stores," who she said prefer to advertise in larger population centers. All of the respondents in the study own stations in rural areas, which is the pattern in women's broadcast ownership (Byerly, 2006; Turner, 2007).

CONTRIBUTIONS AS WOMEN IN A MALE-DOMINATED INDUSTRY

Five of the 10 respondents involved in management of their stations indicated that economic (i.e., profit) motives were the main reason for buying their stations; in all instances, these women had purchased the stations jointly with their husbands. The remaining five said that they were motivated by the desire to engage in public or community service. One woman in the latter group said, "I wanted to build the kind of station the community would support, appreciate and listen to. [I] would hire and train people to be better people and benefit their community." Another said she hoped to "continue the standard set by the former owner in community service and involvement, providing a good work environment for the staff, and proving myself as a business owner." A third indicated that she and her husband hoped "to create a better 'local' radio station" for the communities they reached, and she added, "We have done that!"

Those with a goal to serve local community said they were careful to hire staff that are "community-minded" or "have a concern for the area." Commitment to serving local interest was also seen in programming goals (e.g., in the desire to provide "plenty of local news") to select music and cultural programs that local listeners wanted, and to lend station sponsorship to some local events. One respondent said:

> This is a very small rural community and as the only local station, we try to do the things a small-market station has always done—obituaries, swap shop, community calendar, job service report, locally-produced news and public affairs programs.

One woman, who started out small when she and her husband bought a single radio station, believed that together they had weathered the challenges:

> In an industry that has been taken over by large corporations, my husband and I have turned a one station ownership into a 4 station group lasting 22 years and counting, still "ma and pa" and highly respected in our communities.

Another woman identified her greatest achievement as community service, achieved in no small way through staying true to her ethnic community:

> My common bond is my Hispanic heritage. There is an energy and passion driven by making a spot commercial and seeing the business grow after they advertise with us. Also, the fact that I was able to be the #1 Hispanic station here only in *three* years of business matters to me.

Even some of the respondents who identified themselves as Caucasian had tried to serve an increasingly diverse community. One woman's greatest achievement was not only to "keep it going in the last 18 years, but, "adding more educational programs through grants by partnering with non-profit organizations, and by adding more ethnic groups to our programming."

IDENTIFYING AND ADDRESSING REMAINING GENDER BARRIERS

Women owners in the survey said they understand the importance that women's broadcast ownership holds for other women, both in the industry and in the communities where they operate. Respondents spoke of mentoring other women in the business, serving as a role model, being pleased to serve as inspiration for others, and providing guidance "to the women on my staff." One respondent also recognized the need for women to work together if they were going to succeed:

> Women are blocked from career paths into ownership. We get stuck in lower ranks and jobs, and we can't get the experience as general managers of stations (which is needed to enter the market). Therefore, women have fewer resources to buy stations. I think it's a great idea for women to pool their money and begin to buy stations up.

Not surprisingly, all of the women owners who responded to the survey said their greatest challenges were economic. One said, "It's hard to get into a venture capital pool of money to make your business grow" when men control financial institutions, but others noted that it was much harder to compete (e.g., for advertising sales) and stay profitable in a poor economy. Another said, "As manager and then owner, I have experienced three recessions and 9/11, all devastating." Others spoke of the difficulty to survive in an economy that "has been taken over by large corporations," and others of keeping salaries competitive and paying health benefits. There was also the occasional financial success story, such as the woman who felt satisfaction in being not only able to "survive and succeed as a standalone for 20+ years against some of the largest broadcast groups in the country" but also to "acquire three additional stations."

Interviews with Experts

PROFILE OF EXPERT INFORMANTS

The 17 experts—15 women and 2 men—who volunteered to be interviewed, represent a mix of professional experience highly valuable to bringing a deeper understanding to the larger environment within which women's broadcast ownership operates. Three of the 17 are Hispanic, 2 are African-American, the rest Caucasian. One third are employed at an executive-level position in some aspect of the broadcast industry. Another third are attorneys with a public-interest orientation with respect to women's and minorities' interests, and the remaining third are university-based scholars who study gender and race in media. It bears noting that many of those in the latter two categories of law and academics had prior experience in broadcast. In all, the expert pool represents a diverse, highly knowledgeable source of information for the study.

SITUATING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN THE BROADER ENVIRONMENT

The larger world in which women's broadcast ownership struggles is characterized by both by a hostile, exclusionary regulatory environment, and by a legacy of social practices by which men exclude women from the institutions they control. The women and men interviewed recognized the nexus formed by these two intersecting components that conspire to keep women out of the market. However, these expert informants talked most passionately about the second of these first.

They said they find broadcasting as a masculine environment in which women are unwelcome and systematically squeezed out. One woman said, "Men shape the social environment in broadcasting, and women aren't invited to places where men network, bond and explore business options together." The phrase "old boys club" was used repeatedly to describe what women encounter in trying to make their way up in broadcasting so that they can become owners. One network executive in sales said that "Broadcasting is still an old boys' network. The top positions go to White men who then make decisions about who moves up next." An industry attorney noted similarly that "broadcasting has long been a male business and it's difficult for women to move up." An east coast media company executive echoed, "The broadcast industry has never been conducive to women's ownership—it takes so long for us to rise, and stations are still 'old boys' clubs.' "

FACTORS INHIBITING WOMEN'S OWNERSHIP

Experts identified six specific ways that women's ownership is blocked:

Exclusion from places where decisions are made. While the notion of an exclusionary gender-based "club" might seem to be anachronistic, in fact, it was described vividly in both its manifestations and outcomes by one expert after another, and it had multiple ramifications. The "boys' club" serves to squeeze women out in several ways, they said. The first is by men's customary ways of working in the daily professional environment. This subtle process of discrimination is one in which men share information about the business, including stations going onto the market for sale, in circumstances where women are not invited – on the golf course, at dinner, over drinks, and at other professional and social occasions. The factor of male bonding was made specific by more than one female expert who said that men develop trust through sharing their infidelities and other personal experiences with each other—things they do not share with women. It's within this circle of trust that business transactions occur, for example, sales of stations are agreed to privately and promotions are arranged.

Denial of promotion. Women are thus also shut out of ownership through denial of promotion. The road to ownership, noted one long-time sales executive, is through sales, programming and management. "You need all three to prepare for ownership," she said, "but most women are in ad sales—only a few are in programming, and very few are in management." She, too, noted that "men pick other men to fill key jobs—people like themselves." Like other informants, this woman became weary of the roadblocks in broadcast and moved into cable, which "is more open to women's talent and mobility."

Lack of mentorship. Similarly, men mentor other men but rarely mentor women, something that experts insisted is needed for women to gain confidence and skill associated with purchasing stations. One former sales executive, now a college professor, said, "Women's socialization [in broadcast] doesn't teach us to 'think big', to compete in ways that would prepare us to own stations." Another woman, who was in the process of purchasing a group of stations at the time of the interview, said, "The industry today requires women to take more risks, and women have less experience doing that."

Dismissal of women's skills and differences. Women experts of all ethnicities agreed that men also exclude women from consideration of promotion and mentoring because "we think and behave differently in the workplace." These differences in thought and behavior are precisely what women believe are needed in broadcast. At the managerial level, one woman said, "we operate differently—use different language, different negotiating skills, take 'no' as a definite answer instead of like men who hear 'no' and think, 'well, I just don't have it right yet.'" Another said that "women tend to be more relational in their communications with employees than men are." With respect to content, she said, "we know what 'female perspectives' are in news and other programs." She illustrated by saying that one woman colleague in programming tells music providers not to send her any music with violence, drugs, or misogyny in the lyrics. Another expert said that women owners are "potentially better able to know what women would want and need" in terms of broadcast programming." Another longtime programmer said, "I write in a woman's voice, like I'm your friend, I'm someone you can trust," and she tends to operate that way in her dealings with others at her station. But men in the industry dismiss these skills and insights as plusses.

Rejection by investors. Even women who are able to gain experience and backing to compete for stations may be confronted with another form of subtle discrimination—the attitudinal-based decisions of investment bankers. Virtually every expert interviewed for this study said that women's ownership is stopped by lack of access to capital to purchase and run stations, something also pointed out in other research. One public interest attorney lamented that "women can't convince investors they are ready to manage [a station]." However, another attorney observed, "Even women who are experienced and knowledgeable, and who have access to capital are held to a different standard in the industry." She said, "The 'good old boys' club' wants to see how women are going to perform—they wouldn't do that for a man of similar qualifications." Adding that "women and minorities are both seen as inexperienced and without means . . . so even if you have the capital, you may be outside the accepted network and you won't get in." This point of having both capital and qualifications was reiterated by another expert, a woman with a sizable amount of capital as well as more than 20 years in the broadcast business. She said she had spent the better part of two years trying to purchase a small group of stations, but found that "lending institutions aren't receptive to female clients." She had found that investment bankers had attitudes that women could not run businesses, and she had not been able to secure the remainder of the loans she needed.

A hostile regulatory apparatus. Nowhere is the exclusion to women seen more keenly than in regulation, the structural mechanism that has allowed consolidation and conglomeration throughout the industry since the mid 1990s. One long-time west coast broadcast executive observed, "The loss of diversity in broadcast has come with deregulation—stations no longer reflect the communities they serve." Another woman company executive said, "Deregulation has changed everything—the big groups are able to outbid you, and women lose out." The gendered, and racial, dimensions of deregulation emerged clearly in several interviews, as in this one with a professor of law:

> The Telecommunications Act of 1996 allowed consolidation, first in radio, then TV. That raised prices and promoted duopoly and cross-ownership. Big buyers don't want single stations, they want a group. The FCC didn't consider the impact of these policies on women and minorities, who tend to buy smaller numbers of stations. The FCC has shunted women and minority concerns off to the side.

The professor added, "The regulatory environment is key to women getting into the market. The days of comparative hearings are over, so women have to bid and know how to do that." Another public interest attorney noted that the mechanics of awarding licenses with regard to gender was affected by the

Supreme Court's 1993 decision in *Bechtel vs. the FCC*, which ruled that there is no empirical basis for giving women preferences in the sale of stations. As a result, she said, "most valuable stations have been awarded to White men with a lot of money . . . Today most networks and conglomerates are controlled by men." The present system of lottery and auction in the award of licenses reduces women's chances. She added that the lack of case law on which women can challenge exclusion from such ownership decisions on the basis of gender contributes to women's problems.

WHAT WOULD HELP TO REMOVE BARRIERS

The solutions to women's lack of ownership in broadcast follow closely from the experiences of women who own stations as well as from those who hold some other related expertise. The structural changes are paramount among these.

1. Reforming broadcast regulations suggestions ranged from instituting measures to give women (and most added minorities) a better chance at being considered for stations going up for sale, to limiting the numbers of stations (and other media) that a single owner can possess. One measure in the first category mentioned by several was the reinstatement of the tax certificate, a mechanism used until Congress repealed it in 1995. The tax certificate gave capital tax gains deferrals to sellers who sold to a minority buyer. Women's media advocates believe it should be brought back and extended to female buyers, as well. The legislation is advocated by media justice groups like the Minority Media Telecommunication Council, a Washington, D.C.-based group that promotes diversity and civil rights in the telecommunications industry (http://mmtconline.org/). Limiting ownership, the second measure frequently mentioned, would essentially begin to reverse consolidation, something that has inhibited women's ability to get and keep broadcast stations.
2. Expanding access to capital for women, with new mechanisms as well as present. Some wanted to see the FCC take a more pro-active role in brokering deals and training women to succeed. As many pointed out, broadcast properties today are expensive to acquire and investment backing is essential to become the owner of a station, or to expand the number of stations one owns. An alternative to outside investors was mentioned by several experts who suggested that women explore ways to pool their own resources and jointly begin to buy stations.
3. Creating training and mentorship programs for women to teach them how to learn the business and how to compete. Several of the experts interviewed noted the success that National Broadcast Association's Broadcast Leadership Training (BLT) has had since it began in 2000. The program includes mentoring, field trips, and didactic aspects, such as how to write

a business plan, operate a station and negotiate the FCC process. Others mentioned the National Association of Black-Owned Broadcaster's fellows program that began in 2006 for mid-career broadcast professionals. The program, which selects two fellows a year and has awarded half of its fellowships to women, has the goal of advancing them to general managers' positions—essential precursors to ownership.

4. Expanding women's professional networks aimed at ownership development. These are envisioned as carrying out some of the functions associated with training and mentorship, but in a more informal ongoing way and among wider numbers of women. The intentionality of ownership in these networks is what would distinguish them from other professional associations.
5. Filing complaints and lawsuits to challenge discrimination that inhibits women from owning broadcast stations. One public interest attorney believes that Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) laws should be strengthened and enforced so that the hiring and promotion of women improves. Another noted that adjudication simply hasn't been used as a viable response in cases where women are denied licenses or financial backing.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study provide both personal testimony and informed assessments to complement the scant empirical work that has been published on women's broadcast ownership to date. Overall, information from these 40 individuals—23 female broadcast station owners and 17 experts on the subject—would seem to compel interventions, both at the federal and industry levels if anything is to change. The marketplace has not been women's friend in the last 15 years of deregulation. Au contraire, left largely unfettered, the marketplace has undermined women's most minimal efforts to own stations, and it has overwhelmingly favored men's. Men's almost complete domination of the broadcast industry would have far-reaching implications for women in any nation. That it occurs in a nation that touts freedom of speech as the foundation for its particular form of democracy, the United States is greatly off course in assuring such freedom across gender (and also race, of course). Women residing in the United States do not have access to the public sphere without the means to speak publicly through airwaves that belong to them. This limits their ability to articulate points of view associated with their interests and well-being. As one of the expert informants in the study noted, "Women's issues are really community issues, just from a different perspective."

The study puts several key issues on the public policy agenda. As outlined in the findings, there is a clear and present mandate for Congress and the Federal Communications Commission to institute laws and policies that broaden women's access to broadcast ownership. At the very least are important measures, such as the re-adoption of the tax certificate, and the enabling of appropriate departments within the FCC to offer skills and mentoring for women interested in moving toward station ownership. The matter of re-regulating the industry, something that the Telecommunications Act of 1996 authorizes the FCC to do, by lowering the cap on media companies that can be owned by a single owner, seems paramount at this time. The media watchdog group Free Press (www.freepress.net) identifies six media conglomerates that own the majority of the nation's broadcast, cable, print, and other media companies. This oligopolistic structure was enabled by federal legislation and policy, and it can only be corrected by statutory measures.

Women's organizations have already begun to move these issues into the legal arena. In their legal comment to the FCC on behalf of "NOW et al.," Campbell and Wright (2007) noted that "the Commission has historically focused little attention on women (as distinct from minorities) and actually has done very little to increase the opportunities for women to own broadcast stations." Campbell and Wright noted that women were not beneficiaries of either the distress sale policy[5] or the tax certificate policy when those policies were in effect, and that when the FCC tried to tack some advantages for women onto those of minorities, it resulted in a challenge that ended gender as a criterion for preferences in awarding station licenses. One public interest attorney interviewed for this study also spoke to this ruling, saying it was unfortunate that the *Lambrecht vs. FCC*, written by Justice Clarence Thomas in 1992, had ended gender preferences.

The present study also raises several matters related to women's ownership that require FCC attention. Chief among these is the question of what is the real meaning of "women's ownership" if women have no involvement in the running of their stations—indeed, if they are absentee owners (i.e., owners in "name only") as many of the 23 women surveyed indicated, and that follow-up calls with an additional 64 stations suggested? There is no parallel situation with minority ownership, according to Sandoval's (in press) recent research, which found a direct correspondence among ownership, management, and program content. Furthermore, Sandoval observed, "the pattern of a nexus between minority radio ownership and content has been repeated for more than 30 years" (p. 21). Research is lacking to date that might establish a similar nexus between gender of owners and broadcast programming, but clearly such is needed. If women have no involvement in the running of their stations, how can they represent women's interests by bringing women's voices and issues to the communities they serve? Do FCC staff even consider such matters when they determine whether a station is serving the community's "public interest, convenience and necessity" at relicensing time? One of the attorneys interviewed for the study emphasized that, "It's important to distinguish between 'an owner' and "an 'active owner.' "

There is also a mandate for federal agencies, like the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, to more stringently enforce gender equality within the broadcast environment so that women are more easily able to advance within the profession. More than one public interest attorney interviewed for the study remarked on the need for EEO to play a more active role on women's behalf within broadcast industries.

Within the study's theoretical framework of a feminist normative standard for a socially responsible media system, that media system clearly fails in an overall sense as it exists today. That there are, of course, women owners with a strong community consciousness and a concern for women's interests operating radio and television stations goes without saying, but how many? This small-scale study found a handful in the small number of station owners who participated in the study. There is a need for broader systematic research on the nature of women's ownership in today's media industries to continue the questioning begun by the present study. The study also suggests that women's advocacy and professional organizations have a major role to play in addressing women's marginalization in the broadcast world. Consciousness-raising among their members about the legal issues, active involvement in FCC and Congressional proceedings, and generating broad public awareness are among the roles they could assume.

NOTES

1. The terms *concentration of ownership* and *conglomeration* will be used interchangeably.
2. The FCC is a five-member regulatory body whose commissioners are appointed by the president of the United States. Three members of the commission, including the chairman, represent the party in power at any given time. President George W. Bush, a Republican, appointed commissioners who favored a marketplace-approach to regulation. For a fuller examination of the politics of media policy, see Robert W. McChesney's "The Problem of the Media" (2004).
3. The FCC ownership data base for 2006 (the most recent posted) was used for this research.
4. I left messages on answering machines at most of the remainder but never received returned phone calls. There was no answer at a few of the stations.
5. The FCC's distress sale policy gave minority groups preferential treatment in purchasing stations whose owners were in danger of losing their licenses. A federal court decided the policy was unconstitutional in 1989.

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